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Outline Of Reference Paper On:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RECENT CHANGES IN THE HIGH COMMAND OF THE SOVIET ARMY

by

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Captain Nikolai Galay, once an officer in the White Army, served as an officer in the French Foreign Legion early in World War II. Later in the war, he was a battalion commander in the anti-Soviet army of General Vlasov. He now works with the Institute for the Study of the USSR as a specialist on the Soviet armed forces. In 1956 he contributed a chapter entitled "The Partisan Forces," based partly on his own experience, to B. H. Liddell Hart's compendium "The Red Army," published in New York by Harcourt, Brace and Co.

Dissent resulting from the planned reorganization of the Soviet armed forces appears to be the cause of a number of personnel changes in the Soviet army high command. The most important of these are the reported removal of Marshal Vasili D. Sokolovsky, the expected resignation of Marshal Ivan S. Konev, and the coming to prominence of Marshals Vasili I. Chuikov and Matvei V. Zakharov.

The dissension over the wholesale reduction of the army intelligentsia—the officers—is strong enough to warrant the reinforcement of the high command with such reliable Party men as Chuikov and Zakharov.

Another reason for the command transfers may be the desire of the Party leaders to increase the political reliability of the army, to turn it into an unquestioning weapon of the Party Central Committee.

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A number of recent appointments in the Soviet army high command appear to be connected with the announced plan to demobilize 250,000 officers. The desire of the Party leaders to convert the army into a politically reliable weapon of the Party Central Committee has also played a role in these personnel changes.

The command shuffle, about which the Western world learned solely from the unofficial reports of its correspondents, may be summarized as follows:

Col. Gen. Piotr K. Koshevoi, formerly commander of the Siberian military district, appointed commander of the Kiev military district, replacing Marshal Vasili I. Chuikov, who was transferred to Moscow as Deputy Minister of Defense.

According to reputable Moscow informants, Marshal Vasili D. Sokolovsky, the Army and Navy Chief of Staff and a First Deputy Minister of Defense, was replaced because of illness by Marshal Matvei V. Zakharov, Col. Gen. Ivan I. Yakubovsky succeeding the latter as commander of the Soviet forces in Germany.

Further, well-informed sources reported that Marshal Ivan S. Konev, a First Deputy Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact forces, was ailing also and that his retirement was expected.

It is the belief of many Western observers that these changes were caused by dissension in high army circles in regard to the reorganization of the Soviet armed forces announced by Khrushchev and approved by the Supreme Soviet on January 15, 1960. According to this plan the reduction of conventional forces by 1,200,000 men would be accompanied by a switch in emphasis to nuclear missiles.

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Apart from Chuikov's replacement by Koshevoi, there has been so far no confirmation in the Soviet press of the reported shuffle. However, there is no reason to doubt that the reports are true, since it is most unusual for the Soviet censor to pass dispatches from Western correspondents which include references to "well-informed sources." The very fact that the censor has permitted their release indicates a desire to let them acquire significance by transmission in this semi-illicit manner.

A feature common to all these reports is that they coincided with the May-Day parade, in which emphasis was laid on Soviet rocket might. About forty types of Soviet rockets were displayed in an obvious attempt to give the forthcoming summit conference the impression that the Soviet Union holds an indisputable superiority in this field over the U. S. A.

The appointments of General Koshevoi and General Yakubovsky are routine measures of secondary importance. Their transfers indicate merely a natural process of change, which it is as yet difficult to define as a real trend toward injecting youth into the senior ranks of the army.

Without a doubt the most important events are the removal of Marshal Sokolovsky, the forthcoming departure of Marshal Konev and the promotion of Marshals Chuikov and Zakharov to more responsible posts. The joint general staff of the Soviet armed forces is in effect the main theoretical laboratory of Soviet military science. Marshal Sokolovsky was chief of staff for eight years without a break, longer than anyone except Marshal Boris M. Shaposhnikov, who held the post for ten years, but not continuously. During Sokolovsky's tenure the Soviet military science was emancipated from Stalinist military science and adapted itself to the atomic age. Sokolovsky was an experienced staff officer and the only marshal, apart from the armored forces commander Marshal Pavel A. Rotmistrov, who also had a reputation as a theoretician. Together these two acted as the heralds of new ideas in Soviet military science, although, in view of Sokolovsky's personality, the driving force in the general staff may have been General Malinin, who died in January of this year. Sokolovsky occupied a strong position in the Party hierarchy both under Stalin and after his death, becoming a member of the Central Committee in 1952, but essentially he was a professional soldier rather than a Party man.

Marshal Konev, ranked at the end of the war second only to Zhukov, was the closest of all the marshals to Khrushchev and a constant rival of Zhukov. The importance of his post as First Deputy Minister of Defense was increased by his appointment as Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact forces. A former civil war commissar, he was the essence of the conscientious Party member and professional soldier combined. There have long been rumors of his poor state of health, and these rumors were supported by his absence from official receptions.

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Except for a short spell in 1944 when he was in command of one of the Belorussian fronts, Zakharov, like Sokolovsky, held practically no staff posts during the war. He held no high post in the Party hierarchy. In brief, Zakharov is a factory worker turned soldier and a steadfast Communist.

Marshal Chuikov, a combat soldier with a colorful personality, was the undoubted, though not acclaimed, hero of Stalingrad. Like Zakharov he is of genuine proletarian origin and a Communist since the age of nineteen. At the age of twenty he commanded a regiment during the civil war. Despite his brilliant military reputation, he ended the war as he had started it--- commanding an army, an indication that he was regarded by the high command as not possessing the professional qualities requisite for higher posts.

In attempting to find the connection between these changes and the reported dissension over the new reorganization, it should be borne in mind that such dissension could take two forms. It might arise over the program for making nuclear missiles the principal weapons of the Soviet armed might. Some officers might feel this program will result in destruction of the principle of "harmony," the main feature of Soviet military science, which the Soviet military leaders have always regarded as their main advantage over the West. The breach may have arisen also over the planned reduction of the army, involving the demobilization of 250,000 officers and the transfer of part of the army to a territorial basis, aimed at combining periods of short-term service with work in industry.

The retirement of Sokolovsky cannot be explained by his opposition to the first development since he is one of its chief proponents. As to the second, all regular officers are bound to be opposed to the demotion of hundreds of thousands of the military intelligentsia to the working class. Thus dissension only over the second development could be a reason for the changes now taking place. It may be also concluded that this dissension is sufficiently strong and active to warrant the reinforcement of the army high command with reliable Party men such as Zakharov and Chuikov, despite their lesser professional qualifications.

It may well be that the social implications of the new army reform are the cause of the changes and retirements. The reform obviously reflects the desire of the Party leadership to change the social make-up of the army, since the army still remains a foreign body in a socialist state despite the fact that Party people have been infiltrated into it at all levels. Future changes in the army high command will be designed to communize the army, to turn it into a politically reliable and unquestioning weapon of the Party Central Committee. Finally, it may be pointed out that the Soviet leaders have been compelled to undertake this new reform both for reasons of internal policy and because of ideological competition with Communist China over Marxist leadership in the socialist camp.

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